



John Nelson

Project Argus technician "plays" concerts of light and sound lasting for hours. Bursts of light reflect off immense mirror-like structures filling the exhibition area of the Art and Architecture building. Admission is free.

Light, Sound, People Make 'Argus' Happen

By THOMAS HINE and JOHN COOTS

Project Argus is hundreds of fluorescent lights, expanses of mylar-covered plywood, huge speakers, and an intricate control panel. It stands two stories high in the exhibition area of the Art and Architecture building and never has to do the same thing twice.

Wednesday night, it was a matter of coming in from the rain to have one's retina assaulted and perceptions distorted by what Paul Fuge, who was operating the machine that night, called a relatively simple program.

Those who came found themselves in an environment created by slightly varied electronic hums and by constantly changing patterns of light reflected off the mirror-like mylar walls.

"I feel as though I am in a sort of trance with the lights and people sort of suspended."

"I think it's dangerous, like the ultimate weapon. In the hands of some very unhip people... it could do some dangerous things."

His wife elaborated, "Totally."

"Mirrors. So the people can watch themselves walking around half dead."

"When do the films start?"

"What they're getting at here is time through rhythm. Not the tap-your-foot kind of rhythm, but a visual, light rhythm. You come in off the street looking at the thing objectively, but if you hang in long enough, you start to lift off. That's when you start to appreciate the time rhythm."

"When I came in, I felt as if something was going to happen, but now, a half hour later, I know this is it. There's no more urgency of time, nothing else."

People kept coming, the crowd milled about looking at others wondering, waiting, intellectualizing, in the new light of the strobes and fluorescent banks. Then people started to congregate on the seats in the different areas of the structure. The sound remained constant; the structure continued its almost painful flashing.

First came a burp or two, then a burst of laughter. Some people had a capgun; others began to hum. Soon there was a chorus of frogs which melted into jungle sounds. There were the doers and the explainers.

"When you go to a dance, the sound is changing, and you express yourself visually by dancing. Here the sound is constant and the entire visual environment is changing. If I want to express myself, I've got to make noise."

"This whole thing is an embroidery on boredom."

High above this scene were two men sitting among cables and wires, their faces illuminated by the eerie glow of the oscilloscope on the control panel. And they controlled it all.

The men at the panel were Paul Fuge, a "pulsar," and Bill Crosby, a kinoptician. Fuge explained, "The purpose of Project Argus is to experiment in patterns of light and sound."

The equipment is capable of reproducing any sound, Fuge said, but that was not the purpose of Wednesday's presentation.

"Tonight we're concerned with what the space is that it's shaping. You feel the rhythm by creating spaces that weren't there before. We could rotate a ping through ten different speakers in sequence to achieve such an effect. The concern is not what the sound is but what shape it makes."

He changed the sound to a slightly lower intensity. In one alcove, a group carried out a little playlet.

Fuge bent over the oscilloscope and upped the pitch and volume of the sound. Before, the sound had hit the solar plexus. The new high whine hit the throat. People tightened up downstairs. They stopped their humming, their laughing, and their acting. "I've got to go," one said, and all but a few left.

The men continued to play with their lights, their sounds. The pulsar bent over his control panel, "Watch what they do now..."